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BEFORE THE

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Chairman Smith, Mr. Payne, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing on the plight of street children across the globe. Your concern is appreciated. The State Department shares this concern and commends you for your efforts on this issue.

Each year the Department submits the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* to this Committee. Section 5 of each country's chapter includes our reporting on children. While we submit these documents each February, our embassies and posts monitor and report on acts of discrimination and persecution against children throughout the year. The Department instructs posts covering countries with large populations of displaced children – including refugees or street children – to follow these issues.

As our officers prepare these reports they draw on many sources of information, including first-hand experiences and reports provided by human rights groups. I am sure you will learn much from members of the second panel, as we benefit regularly from the work of NGOs. Lord Alton has also asked to meet us later this week, and we look forward to his visit. My message to all these groups is to work with us and communicate with us, so we all can improve our reporting and activities on behalf of the children.

I am also pleased to be joined today by Lloyd Feinberg who heads the Displaced Children and Orphan's Fund at the United States Agency for International Development. In my testimony I will describe several of the most pressing issues facing children living in the streets. Mr. Feinberg will then describe USAID's program designed to benefit children, as well as some of the lessons he has learned in this endeavor.

A survey of the *Country Reports* suggests that children end up on the streets for a variety of reasons, including conflict, poverty, and HIV/AIDS. Some are exploited in prostitution or are subjected to other forms of human trafficking, and others face abuse by security forces and citizens. Too many children's stories are never told, and too many continue to face the streets alone. Today, I would like to draw your attention to the stories of three children who were forced to face the harsh realities of their countries streets at a very young age.

In May, DRL officers visited several refugee camps along the Chad/Sudan border to assess the violence in Darfur. During this trip they

were struck at the number of children occupying each camp. On average, over 95 percent of the population in these camps are women, and children under the age of 10. Some of these children are accompanied by a parent, and some have no idea where their families may be, or even if they are still alive. During one such visit, officers encountered a group of children who were given paper and crayons by a local NGO. The officers received disturbing drawings by children as young as 5 years of age that conveyed acts of violence. They included acts of torture and savage killings that took place in their homes by the Jinjaweed, drawings of men being beaten and beheaded, and women, sometimes their mothers and sisters, being ganged raped.

Keep in mind that these were children reached by NGO programming, whereas the larger picture for isolated street children in Sudan, and those detained by the government for committing crimes, is often much bleaker.

The Sudanese government funds “reformation camps” for children detained by police. The living conditions are primitive, and the camps offer poor health care and education. It is typical for us to find that racial, ethnic, or religious identification of street children plays a significant role in their treatment. In Sudan, all of the children in camps, including non-Muslims, must study the Koran, and there is pressure on non Muslims to convert to Islam.

The detention situation in the Philippines is also grim. Approximately 1,500 Filipino children, most incarcerated for crimes such as common theft or substance abuse, are currently incarcerated among the adult inmate population where they are vulnerable to sexual abuse, recruitment into gangs, and forced labor.

And in Brazil, credible, locally-based human rights groups report the existence of organized death squads linked to police forces that target suspected criminals and persons considered "undesirable” — such as street children — in almost every state.

Male teenagers in the Sudanese camps (and, in the south, some girls) are often conscripted into the People’s Defense Forces. Conscripts face significant hardship and abuse in military service, often serving on the frontline. There are also reports that abducted, homeless, and displaced

children are discouraged from speaking languages other than Arabic or practicing religions other than Islam.

Timothy's story was provided by an NGO that collects and shares invaluable human rights information with my office. Timothy — a fourteen year old boy in Uganda — was one of the many child soldiers in his country. He remembers his first time on the front line. Timothy recalls, "The other side started firing, and the commander ordered us to run through the bullets. I panicked. I saw others falling down dead around me. The commanders were beating us for not running, for trying to crouch down. They said if we fall down, we would be shot and killed by the soldiers."

Between 32,000 and 52,000 children known as "night commuters" travel from conflict areas in Uganda, or from internally displaced persons camps each night to urban centers to avoid abduction by the Lord's Resistance Army. In March 2004, the U.N. estimated that nearly 18,800 children commute nightly into Gulu town, 11,000 into Kitgum, and 11,000 into a Kalongo Hospital in Pader District. Last year, the government cooperated with NGOs to establish shelters for such children in tented dormitories and other semi-permanent structures. However, children also sleep under balconies or on the grounds of schools, churches, and hospitals. Conditions range from harsh to adequate. Many credible reports also confirm that many displaced girls are involved in prostitution.

Sadly, our *Country Reports* describe similar situations elsewhere in the world. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, between 25,000 and 50,000 child refugees, war orphans, and other children, widely perceived to be street thugs, are accused of witchcraft or sorcery. They live on the streets throughout the country, and engage in petty crime, begging, and/or prostitution. These circumstances are not rare, and are closer to those described in our country reports of children in Luanda, Angola where approximately 1,500 street children shine shoes, wash cars, carry water, beg, prostitute, and often resort to petty crime to survive.

Our third story, comes from a new member of my office with me today. He traveled to Peru in 2003 specifically to work with street children as young as four. In addition to encountering stark police and public brutality towards street children, he was struck by the contrast he observed between some Peruvian perceptions of these children and his direct experiences working with them. Street children are commonly referred to as

“piranhas” and, if they are detained by the police, are often labeled as such with a small fish tattooed on their hand, just above their thumb. Contrary to fears that street children are dangerous and inhuman, as the tattoos might suggest, Jacob found the only striking difference between the street children and others was the lack of family support for them. Instead, these children turned to each other or to others on the streets for this support. Parentless, and surrounded by oppressors, poverty, and crime, these children need tools and support to lead a productive life.

In Peru, largely because of widespread poverty, approximately one-third of all school-age children and adolescents work rather than attend school. Children living in poverty average only 7.8 years of education, and about half of those who go to primary school complete high school. Approximately 25 percent of children under age 5 are malnourished, and violence against children, trafficking of children, and informal child labor also remain serious problems.

The government of Peru, however, has shown commitment to children's well-being. The government provides free, compulsory education through secondary school, new laws more closely define trafficking in persons, criminalize Internet child pornography and sexual tourism involving children, and provide punishments for those who derive financial benefit from these activities. Penalties for pimps and clients of underage prostitutes range from 4 to 8 years in prison. In March, the Government formed a permanent, ministerial-level Multi-Sectoral Committee (MSC) to work on the issue of trafficking in persons. The Committee is chaired by the Ministry of the Interior and includes representatives from 10 government ministries and agencies, 3 international organizations, and 5 national organizations.

The situation is only bleaker in countries where governments do not put time or energy into programs for street children, or even worse, where governments contribute to the lifestyles that deny these children of dignity, and their basic right to live a healthy life. The situations are worse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where police and street children collude, where street children pay police officers for the right to sleep in abandoned buildings, and sometimes pay a percentage of goods stolen in large markets, as violence against street children is on the rise.

While it saddens me to report that this is the state of the world, we would like to thank the committee for holding this hearing today to call attention to the plight of street children across the globe. I am sure Mr. Fienberg will provide a clear picture of what assistance our government is providing to help address these problems through the Displaced Children and Orphan's Fund at USAID. Once again, we look forward to working with the Committee to elevate these important issues.